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The Legend of Multnomah Falls

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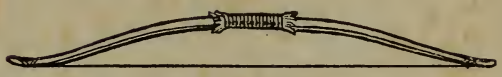
The Legend of Multnomah Falls

Sincerely yours.
Susan H Smith

The Legend of Multnomah Falls

BY

Susan Williamson Smith



We are told by the Indians this Legend;
How Pestilence, Sickness and Woe left the tribe;
But Valor, Glory, Power were lost them forever more.

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Dedicated

TO

ELIZABETH TOWNE
LISCHEN M. MILLER
J. T. SHELTON

The triumvirate of friends who are in part responsible for the thoughts herein expressed.

UP THE COLUMBIA

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Foreword

HE GREATEST of all the cascades that beautify the magnificent cliffs of the Upper Columbia is "Multnomah Falls." The water dashes fearlessly, boldly down a precipice eight hundred feet high, and then, as if exhilarated by the leap, takes another (forty foot) plunge. To a lover of nature, this cascade alone would more than repay the long journey across the continent. The waters are constantly supplied by the melting snow and are as clear as crystal. Through the beautiful crystal white spray one sees the grey rocks and boulders, covered with every tint and shade of nature's green; here and there a bit of brown, and yellow, and red; of moss, and fern, and flower, the tall fir trees lovingly sheltering all, ever pointing the way to heaven—a scene never to be forgotten.

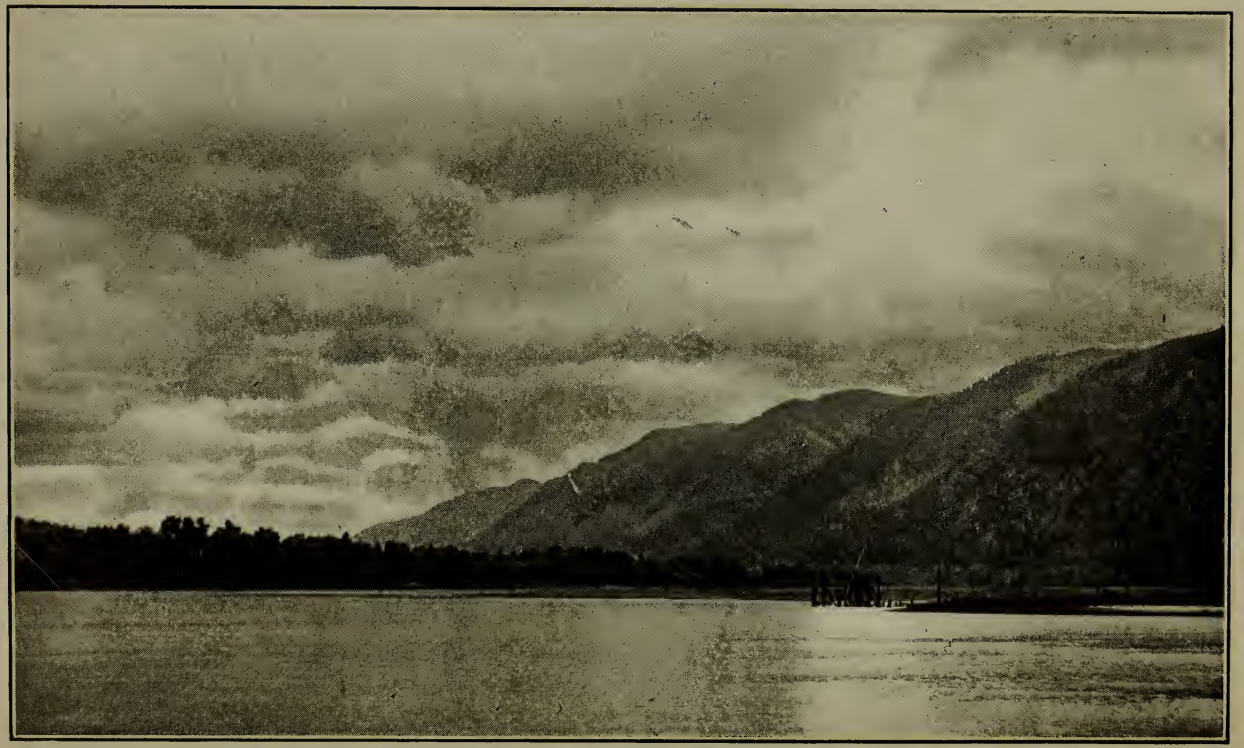
The only regret is that one cannot with words depict one-thousandth part of the beauty, the charm, of such a scene. It beggars even the artist's brush. All the cliffs and falls of the Columbia are rich in Indian legendry and enchantment, and each has its pretty tragic story. There are several about "Multnomah Falls." I like best the one I have chosen for the theme of the following poem. It illustrates so perfectly the fact that all the cruelty of man to man has been the outcome of acting under strong excitement, usually caused by some person or persons, for selfish purposes: That God speaks to man only when he meditates "In the Silence."

The Legend of Multnomah Falls

The tom-toms beat! The night is wild!
The storm is fierce! The winds
Are singing nature's requiem.
A soul returns to God.

The Great Spirit is angry.
He has hidden his face
From his children. With his love
The light has gone. Sorrow,
Sickness, pestilence, and death
Have come to the tribe, once
Mighty and great in the love
Of him they have angered: their God.

So tom-toms resound!
And the chief of the tribe,
The medicine men, the seers,
The prophets, are in council assembled.
They plead for mercy in vain.
This time as a sacrifice,
A pure maiden is demanded.
No earthly sin must stain her brow—
Innocence *her* crown of thorns!
Zeal and Love Divine must form *her* cross,
And the spear thrust in her side
The pestilence of her people.



IN THE PALISADES

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Have we Christians the only God?
Did the Father not give his love
To any of his children
Ere Christ came to save? Were all
Of the millions of souls who lived
Upon this beautiful earth,
Were they all—all lost? Forever damned?
Do Christians dare question
The mercy of God,
Who has been worshipped
From the *beginning*
And will be until the *end?*

Heathens—we are taught to call them—
To their Father, the "Great Spirit," have
come;
With sorrow and grief they are laden.
Will He not listen to them?
The seers see a vision!
The prophets hear a voice!
Has it not ever been so with
The suffering children of men?
"God demands a sacrifice!
One for the many slain."

The Great Spirit has heard
Their prayers. The seers, the prophets
Have spoken. But where can
A maiden be found,
Innocent, pure, and saintly,
A *willing* sacrifice?

When, when, ye children of men,
Will ye understand the Father?
When will ye keep the golden rule—
Live the wondrous Love Divine?
When comprehend that each one
Must have *his* Gethsemane,
Must bear *his* cross, *his* burden—
Not sacrifice his brother?
When will the church this lesson teach?

When will humanity hearken
To this truth—that love supreme,
Joy, peace, good will, is the birthright
Of all who so liveth.

CAPE HORN

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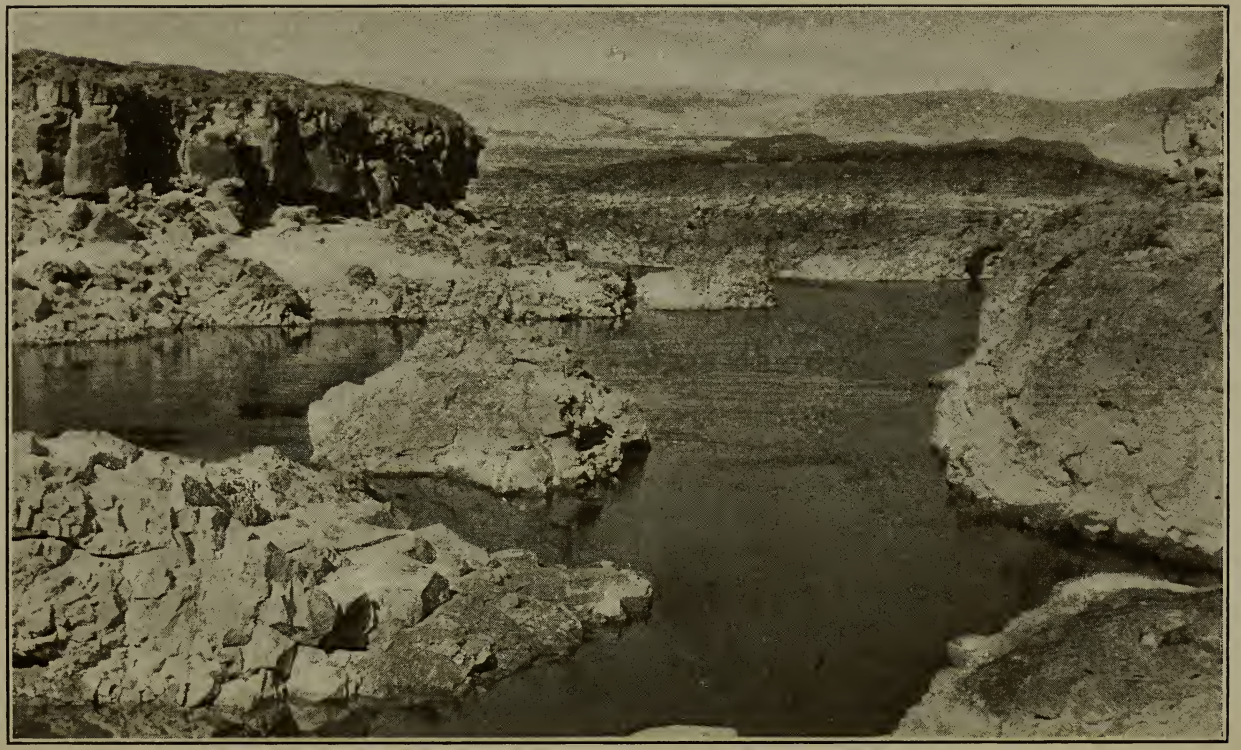
After the storm the peaceful calm.
Tired Nature has fallen asleep
And rests. Her dreams of joy,
Of love, of peace, are reflected
O'er hill, vale, and river.

Drink in, my soul, this beautiful scene.
Dwell in my heart forever.
A cliff magnificent, sublime,
Looks down on a mighty river.
Solemn it stands in its grandeur.
The river, in peaceful repose, at rest,
In the light of the harvest moon



THE NARROWS

SHOWING THE FACE OF THE NATIONS

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Smiles to itself with pride as it notes
The picture so fair on its bosom—
Of quiet dell and shady nooks,
Dimpled 'tween crags and rocks;
Of lofty peaks; of the
Proud, magnificent mountain
All its *own*—by the law of reflection.

Soft, yet clear, I hear a voice
That whispers unto me.
Humanity is but the image of God
Reflected in the River of Life, my dear.
When hate, passion, the surface ruffles,
When winds of adversity blow,
The picture is marred, distorted,
Lost to view—till Christ
Calms the tempest with, "Peace! Be still!"

Hark! A soft tread breaks the stillness,
So light it seemeth part of the silence.
It is Multnomah, the old chief's daughter.
She stands in the light of the moon's white
rays,
No adornment save her pearly white robe;
It has caught the silvery light in its folds
And gleams and shines like the stars,
So fair, so fair a sight is Multnomah,
The princess of noble and high degree,
The pride of the Willamettes is she.

She stands on the brink of a precipice;
Eight hundred feet below
The river flows, calm, serene.
She feels no fear; love, perfect love,
Is hers for her brethren dear.
Her pure and lovely spirit illumines
Her features so fair; she murmurs,
"Great Spirit, 'The Oracle' has spoken;
You are angry with my people;
You demand a sacrifice of a pure
An undefiled maiden. Will I,
Great Spirit, suffice?
Look into my heart; only love is there.
Look into my soul; only peace.
Accept me. Dear Father, some token give."
She folds her hands across her breast,
She lifts her eyes to heaven,
One moment her form sways, then falls.
Who knows what the token given?

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MULTNOMAH FALLS

Behold! A miracle! Her form
As it falls is changed in a moment,
"In the twinkling of an eye,"
To the emblem, to man,
Of life, purity, spirit.
And ever adown the mountain side,
As long as the world shall be,
This beautiful, crystal white water shall fall
In memory—in memory.

The pearly gates swing open;
The skies gleam red, blue and gold,
The reflection of rubies,
Of sapphires, topaz, pearls.
Man says, "The sun is rising."
Short-sighted man. A soul
Returns to its maker—to the
Beautiful city above.

INDIAN TEPEE

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Nature from her repose awakens,
Beholds the glorious cascade
All aglow with colors of morn.
She whispers, "Multnomah."
The gentle breeze bears the whisper
Far away to the children of men;
In their hearts it lives, a sweet dream,
To guide them to "Multnomah Falls."

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